

2012 AUTISM PROGRAM REPORT
DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES
PREPARED FOR THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING
MAY 22, 2012

Purpose of the Report

To inform the Board regarding the status of the Denton ISD special program and services provided to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Board Goal

II. Teaching and learning....In pursuit of excellence, the district will practice true accountability based on measurement of individual student progress over time, regardless of external mandates.

History and Philosophy

The Denton ISD Department of Special Education provides comprehensive programming for students meeting eligibility for special education services under the federal eligibility requirements of Autism (AU). Students are eligible for special education services under one category, but the disorder includes students who exhibit a number of very individual and diverse symptoms and characteristics that fall along the Autism Spectrum. Because of the extreme variability of these student characteristics and because of Denton ISD's devotion to the belief that as much as possible, all students should have the opportunity to receive their education in a general education setting and with their disabled peers, Denton ISD has provided an integrated program for students with ASD, allow every possible opportunity to assess AU program services while being provided instruction in a general education setting. Currently the majority of students with ASD in DISD are educated in general education classes with special education inclusion support and provided an array of services specific to their disability and individualized needs. The autism spectrum includes students with exceptional cognitive skills as well as some with very limited cognitive skills. Students with very limited cognitive skills have often times been included in the Life Skills program based on their individual needs. The autism program has also accessed the Social Adjustment program for some students who have behavioral and emotional needs so great as to make full day general education support untenable. Young students with ASD are often in PPCD classrooms for early instruction. The majority of these students then enter regular Kindergarten classes, with numerous forms of special supports (referred to in federal law as supplemental aids and services). Presently there are 24 students being educated in the general education setting with full-time one-to-one assistance in order to make this instructional arrangement possible.

Within the classroom there are two highly respected models for specific instruction for students with autism (although these methods work for other students as well). The TEACCH model, which is based on structured teaching, social and behavioral principals was developed in the Education Department at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. This model is well respected and was developed specifically as an instructional model for a school setting. The second accepted model is the Applied Behavior Analysis Model, which was originally designed as a therapy model to be used one- on- one with very severely

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disabled students. The principles for this model are well researched and well known to all with training in behavioral psychology. Over many years the principles for this model have been expanded to be more easily utilized in a classroom setting, particularly if the classrooms have a small number of students. The model is based on behavior analysis, repetition, reinforcement theory, and data collection.

In the summer of 2003 a significant number of Denton ISD special education teachers and several general education teachers were provided, within the district, a two week seminar on TEACCH conducted by a national expert in that area. Many of those teachers taught Social Adjustment, Life Skills, PPCD and Trans-K classes. As much as possible, this training was incorporated into their classrooms.

The principles of ABA are used in classrooms, and specifically in developing a Behavior Intervention Plan for each student with ASD.

Over the years the principles of ABA have become a more popular intervention for students with ASD, both inside and outside the classroom. In addition to the program offered by the school many parents provide their student with ABA therapy sessions and other services, such as occupational therapy. These services are valuable supplements to educational programs.

In 2009 The University of North Texas conducted an evaluation of the Denton ISD Autism Program. That evaluation fully supported many aspects of the current program. The areas that were considered to be specific weaknesses were definition and consistency of the program across campuses and the need to develop, particularly at pre-school and elementary levels, specific classrooms to address the needs of those children whose needs are so great as to require very restricted intervention.

For Denton ISD special education, 2009 was a year mostly devoted to addressing TEA RF monitoring. Under new special education administrative leadership in the 2010-2011 academic year we began to strengthen areas of weakness that had been identified in the AU program and collect data to support specific additions and program changes. In fact many changes were implemented, but not to the original intent due to the public school financial crisis. Below you will find a list of the recent additions in training and programming. This year, 2011-2012 there has been an AU program committee of eight who has researched, collaborated, and visited specific districts across this area of Texas who have developed high quality, evidence- based AU programs. The goal of the committee is to initiate additional changes to the AU program, including specific classrooms to address the individualized needs of some of our students.

Current Status

Currently the total number of Denton ISD special education students is 2,473. To date, DISD has 225 students identified with ASD (AU) as a primary, secondary or tertiary disability. Stated in percentage this

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population of students represents 9% of the special education population in DISD. Currently the distribution of students with ASD (AU) is as follows: Preschools - 10, Elementary Schools – 123, Middle School – 53, High School – 39. The PEIMS October 2011 snapshot count data in SPEARS currently reports primary disabilities which is noted as 166 students or 6.9% of the students with disabilities in DISD.

At present, students with ASD (AU) are provided the following services as determined by the Annual, Review and Dismissal Committee (ARDC). Decisions regarding services and supports are made by the ARDC based on data and evaluation. Services include:

Service (number receiving service)

- Autism Supplement (225)
- Behavior Intervention Plan (225)
- Psychological Services (225)
- Classroom Accommodations (225)
- Assistants (24)
- In-Home Training (17)
- Parent Training (14)
- Occupational Therapy (85)
- Music Therapy (19)*
- Adapted Physical Education/Partners in PE (24)
- Speech Therapy (173)

*denotes that more students receive MT. Only 19 have individual therapy.

As the department began discussing the need to restructure or revitalize the services provided to ASD (AU) students, training began for teachers working with this population of students. During the 2010-2011 elementary teachers were required to view 7 AU training DVD modules. The modules ranged from introduction to Autism to instructional strategies as well as behavioral strategies. Beginning the 2011-2012 school, middle and high school teachers were mandated to receive at least 6.5 hours of instructional strategies training. This training was facilitated differently at campuses; however, the selected training was approved by the Executive Director. A variety of training was accessed during the school year to meet the mandate of at least 6.5 hours of training: Texas Statewide Leadership for Autism Training – on-line training hosted by ESC Region 13, campus designed training, 7 AU training DVD modules, etc... This year, two DISD special education leadership team (SELT) members organized and facilitated the first Autism Parent meeting. During the meeting they gathered input from parents for future meetings and possible parent training district wide. Beginning 2011-2012, a member of the SELT began having campus Autism contact meetings to begin providing information, guidance and training to at least one identified person at each campus. Each campus identified a person as their Autism contact,

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that person attended the scheduled meetings after school then shared the information with their campus. The plan this year was to begin with a few meetings and increase the number of meetings as well as the information provided.

Additionally a SELT member has consulted with teachers refine or create a structured classroom. During the school year DISD has consulted with a board certified behavior therapist to brainstorm additional strategies and practices to ensure access and participation to general education in order benefit educationally from special education and related services. To better complete autism multidisciplinary teams the department has purchased VP MAPP. This will be used for evaluation as well as development of goals and objectives. Finally, several campuses have sensory motor labs.

Closing

The Special Education Leadership team has had the opportunity to positively influence the improvement of special education services and support for students eligible as a student with Autism. We will continue to provide strategic higher level training and guidance to for teachers in order that students are successful and benefit educationally. We will continue to focus on finding solutions to identified areas of needed improvement.